

Subjective Perception of School Openness by Vocational School Teachers in Slovakia

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Abstract

The proposed paper presents the partial results of a research study on the perceived quality of the organisational climate in Slovak vocational schools, focusing on the situation in individual self-governing regions in Slovakia. The authors attempt to confirm a hypothesis presuming the existence of statistically significant differences in the evaluation of school openness between groups of teachers working in different parts of Slovakia caused by regional differences. For the carried-out investigation, the OCDQ-RS scale by Hoy, Tarter, and Kottkamp adapted to the conditions of the Slovak Republic was used. The results confirmed the existence of differences in the subjective evaluation of school openness according to self-governing regions, which is an essential finding for school leaders, especially in the context of the leadership style they apply, but also for policymakers from the aspect of introducing measures to eliminate the existing regional differences in Slovakia.

Keywords: Organisational climate, School openness, Vocational schools, Slovak Republic

1 Introduction

School organisational climate is a relatively durable quality defined by Platania, Morando, and Santisi (2022) as a multidimensional construct. It refers to the overall climate and environment typical for an educational institution, which is characterised by collective (Hellriegel, 2008) or shared (Hoy, 2022) perceptions of behaviour, work environment (Weijie & Taek, 2022), prevailing attitudes, shared values, evaluations (Herdman & McMillan-Capehart, 2010), norms, practices, policies, and procedures (Schneider et al., 2013) that shape the interpersonal relationships and interactions (Obdržálek, Horváthová et al., 2004) within the school, i.e.

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among students, teachers, students' parents, administrators, and other stakeholders. Undoubtedly, a school's organisational climate has an undeniable impact on its functioning, as well as on its overall success or failure (Khun-Inkeeree et al., 2021) on the educational market.

The quality of the organisational climate impacts how people feel and behave in a school. Therefore, it is worth paying attention to creating such conditions for teachers, which they subjectively evaluate as favourable. Suppose stakeholders subjectively perceive the organisational climate as positive. In that case, it can provide comfort within the organisation and positively impact teachers' work and their and students' performance (Kapa & Gimbert, 2017). The importance of a positive working experience from the aspect of teachers' job satisfaction is highlighted by Affolter (2019), who also accentuates the existence of a link between positive perception of various phenomena in schools and teachers' work engagement. According to Ulich and Wülser (2004), job satisfaction is closely related to individuals' needs and compliance with various job characteristics. They also draw attention to the instability of job satisfaction, which they characterise as a short-term reaction based on individuals' subjective evaluation of work conditions.

Based on the above, it can be assumed that a positive organisational climate has the potential to make achieving a school's goals more manageable (Hashimoto & Maeda, 2021) and since the teachers' satisfaction in the school can increase their productivity and performance quality, school managements should invest time and energy into creating positive both social and physical school environments promoting the internal systems' healthy functioning.

1.1 Subjective evaluation and teacher job satisfaction

A range of factors influences the quality of organisational climate – including factors both inside and outside the school – and therefore, each school's organisational climate is unique. Being a subjectively perceived characteristic, it must be pointed out that individual stakeholders can evaluate it differently based on the quality of their interactions within the school environment (Hashimoto & Maeda, 2021), their personalities, experiences, education, social or cultural background, etc. to the extent that there may be individuals who are extremely satisfied with the organisational climate but also teachers, students, or parents that perceive it as harmful. Moreover, this evaluation of the quality of organisational climate may develop over time, which is a natural process under the influence of gaining new experiences in the context of a particular school, as well because of personal and professional development. Such experiences can lead to both comfort and discomfort in teachers, which not only affect their attachment to the school (James & McIntyre, 1996). Still, they can also influence the school's overall functioning and the quality of interactions within the institution. Suppose teachers perceive the organisational climate as unhealthy. In that case, it can lead to a loss of motivation and enthusiasm or even teachers' job dissatisfaction (Hur et al., 2016) and, subsequently, to decreased performance. These factors are vital as they can affect the

organisation's functioning, interactions between individuals, and their emotional response and attachment to the organisation.

The quality of school organisational climate is a predictor of teacher job satisfaction (Khun-Inkeeree et al., 2021; Hashimoto & Maeda, 2021), which is a crucial phenomenon when the teaching staff's stability is considered, since – as pointed out by Ladd (2001) – if the existing conditions are perceived as negative or unsatisfactory, it may lead to teachers' decision to leave the school. Therefore, to prevent teacher fluctuation, measures should be taken in each school to achieve high levels of teacher job satisfaction, i.e. to create an organisational climate that provides the highest possible level of comfort and satisfaction in the institution (Khun-Inkeeree et al., 2021) by providing space for self-development and self-realisation in a positive, stimulating, and motivating environment.

Teacher job satisfaction is a complex, multi-faceted concept. It is a result of subjective experiences associated with teachers' positive feelings in their roles as educators, and so, in one school, there are teachers with various levels of job satisfaction. It is influenced by multiple factors influencing teacher job satisfaction, while not all of them are associated with their work.

1.2 Factors Impacting School Organisational Climate

School organisational climate is a dynamic concept determined by a range of factors, which are assigned various influences by diverse authors depending on the approach they apply. Cohen et al. (2009) focused on the impact of social interactions, administrative and academic practices including the used leadership style in the school, but there are also other frequently mentioned factors, e.g. the composition of classes, the teaching staff, other professionals in schools, the non-teaching staff, individual characteristics of teachers, students, organisational structure, etc. From the presented research study's perspective, the below factors having an impact on school organisational climate are essential:

1. School culture – School culture is defined by shared values, beliefs, assumptions (Hoy, 2022), traditions, attitudes, and behaviours characteristic for the overall environment within an educational institution. School culture determines how community members (students, teachers, non-teaching staff, administrators, and students' parents) interact and what approaches to teaching and learning are applied. All these factors shape the school culture and are decisive from the aspect of achieving (not only) educational goals and healthy interactions within the school environment (Bočková et al., 2017), as well as a school's success (Teasley, 2017). The responsibility for the character of school culture is often wrongly assigned exclusively to school leaders – it is often forgotten that all members of the school community shape school culture. On the other hand, school leaders and their work can set a tone for school culture (Easton-Brooks et al., 2018).

2. Leadership style – There is some research evidence (e.g. Bush, 2021) that the applied leadership style is influenced by school culture and vice versa, but also that leaders alone cannot create a positive school culture – and subsequently favourable organizational climate – although they have the power to influence it strongly (Hallinger & Heck, n.d.). In this context, the applied leadership style has a crucial role to play.

Leadership style can be defined as an approach or manner in which school leaders exercise authority, make decisions, communicate, and guide the educational organization. Different leaders may employ various styles based on their personality, beliefs, and the specific context of their leadership role. Even though the employed leadership style has either a positive or negative impact on the organisational climate, there needs to be a consensus about which leadership style leads to the best results, and leaders usually apply a combination of them depending on the current circumstances and the goals to be achieved. Bush (2003) distinguishes between eight basic leadership styles: 1. managerial leadership; 2. transformational leadership; 3. participative leadership; 4. political and transactional leadership; 5. post-modern leadership; 6. moral leadership; 7. instructional leadership; and 8. contingent leadership.

3. Teacher engagement – Teacher engagement is a long-term characteristic (Kärner et al., 2021), which refers to teachers' commitment, enthusiasm, and dedication influenced by their attitudes towards their profession. Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) describe it as a positive state of mind for which vigour, dedication, and absorption are characteristic.

Teacher engagement is associated with teachers' career satisfaction (Timms & Brough, 2013; Shaver & Lacey, 2003) and with overall school effectiveness and student success. Engaged teachers are more likely to invest time and energy in their teaching, foster positive relationships with students, collaborate with colleagues, and contribute to the overall improvement of the educational environment. It has also been confirmed that teachers' work engagement can be increased by providing autonomy (Rothman & Fouché, 2018).

4. Relationship and interactions – From creating a positive and effective learning environment, relationships in schools and the stakeholders' willingness to collaborate and support each other (Lajčin & Porubčanová, 2021) are foundational. These include relationships between students and teachers, teachers and administrators, peers, and the broader school community. The quality of relationships in schools is, according to Obdržálek et al. (2002), a relatively long-term characteristic. Still, it must be pointed out that it is influenced by various external and internal factors, including teachers' personalities, the applied leadership style, etc. Investing time and effort into building and maintaining positive relationships in schools can create a positive, supportive, and inclusive organisational climate and promote holistic development in students. A positive school organisational climate with healthy interaction can be characterised by trust and loyalty (Kanu et al., 2022).

1.3 The Concept of School Openness

In the present study, we operate with school openness, for which open communication, mutual respect and support, collaboration, shared responsibility, clearly defined rules, and trust are typical. Cultivating school openness is a continuous process targeted at improvement that requires all stakeholders' involvement. Hoy (2022) accentuates that the degree of school openness that can be assigned to a particular school is between open and closed. While in open schools, teachers and leaders are supportive, genuine, and engaged, closed schools lack authenticity, and game-playing and disengaged behaviour occur in them.

2 Methods

In the Slovak Republic, there needs to be more research in the field of school organisational climate. The associations between school organisational climate and teachers' resilience levels are investigated as a part of the international project – grant number IGA003DTI/2022 Vocational School Teachers' Resilience. This paper presents the partial results of the research study carried out with the grant project focused on the quality of organisational climate and regional differences in the subjective evaluation of school openness among vocational schoolteachers in Slovakia.

2.1 Research Sample

The research sample consisted of 474 Slovak vocational schoolteachers from all eight self-governing regions in the country (see Table 1). All age groups of teachers with a diversity in the length of their teaching experience were represented.

Table 1 Composition of the sample according to self-governing regions

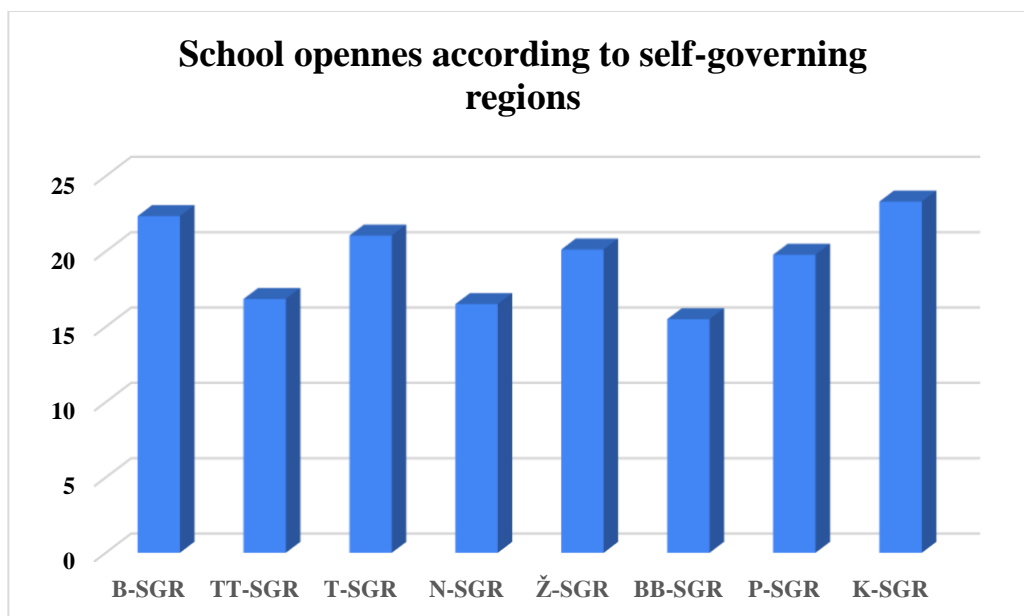
<u>Teachers</u>	<u>Gender/Self-Governing Region</u>				<u>Total</u>	<u>%</u>
	<u>Male</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>%</u>		
Bratislava	33	6.96%	81	17.09%	114	24.05%
Trnava	9	1.90%	48	10.13%	57	12.03%
Trenčín	42	8.86%	75	15.82%	117	24.68%
Nitra	27	5.70%	9	1.90%	36	7.59%
Žilina	6	1.27%	18	3.80%	24	5.06%
Banská Bystrica	27	5.70%	33	6.96%	60	12.66%
Prešov	15	3.16%	12	2.53%	27	5.70%
Košice	21	4.43%	18	3.80%	39	8.23%
Total	180	37.97%	294	62.03%	474	100.00%

2.2 Research tool

In the present study, the standardised OCDQ-RS – The Organizational Climate Description for Secondary Schools (Hoy, n.d.) – developed by Hoy, Tarter, and Kottkamp (Hoy, Tarter, & Kottkamp, 1991; Hoy & Tarter, 1997) and adapted to the conditions in the Slovak Republic by Gavora and Braunová (2010) was used. The scale consists of 34 items examining the following five dimensions – 1. Supportive principal behaviour (SPB), Directive principal behaviour (DPB), Engaged teacher behaviour (ETB), Frustrated teacher behaviour (FTB), and Intimate teacher behaviour (ITB). The respondents indicated the frequency of certain phenomena’s occurrence in schools on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = rarely occurs to 4 = very frequently occurs. Based on the calculated scores for individual dimensions, the index of school openness was computed as $IO = (SPB + ETB) - (DPB - FTB)$. The Scale was administered online. The gathered data were processed, and further analysis was carried out in SPSS 22.00.

3 Results

The analysis of the situation in the field of the existence of associations between the subjectively perceived degree of school openness by vocational schoolteachers and the region (self-governing region) in which they work has brought some interesting results.



Note: B-SGR – Bratislava Self-Governing Region; TT-SGR – Trnava Self-Governing Region; T-SGR – Trenčín Self-Governing Region; N-SGR – Nitra Self-Governing Region; Ž-SGR – Žilina Self-Governing Region; BB-SGR – Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region, P-SGR – Prešov Self-Governing Region; K-SGR - Košice Self-Governing Region

Figure 1: School openness according to self-governing regions.

As it is displayed in Figure 1, the highest scores were achieved by vocational schoolteachers in Košice Self-Governing region, which was followed by Bratislava Self-Governing Region, Trenčín Self-Governing Region, Žilina Self-Governing Region, Prešov Self-Governing region, Trnava Self-Governing Region, and Nitra Self-Governing Region. The lowest score was achieved in Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region. Based on the obtained results, the self-governing regions can be divided into three groups, within which the achieved scores were comparable. The calculated scores for school openness indicate that school organizational climate is most positively perceived in the only two self-governing regions, in which no rural areas or villages are included – Košice and Bratislava. It suggests that teachers working in towns or cities are more satisfied in their schools. The second group is formed by Trenčín Self-Governing Region, Žilina Self-Governing Region, and Prešov Self-Governing Region; and the third group includes Trnava Self-Governing Region, Nitra Self-Governing Region and Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region. In the characteristics of the self-governing regions included in the second and the third groups, no apparent differences were observed that explain why teachers perceive their schools' organisational climate differently. Therefore, further research is needed in the field.

4 Conclusion

In the Slovak Republic, research activities in the field of school organisational climate are rare, and it can be assumed that, in general, vocational schools represent a neglected field of interest. We intended to fill the gap in the discussed field by realising the grant project. The above-presented partial results show that teachers' subjective quality of school organisational climate varies according to self-governing regions.

Despite the limits of the above-presented research study given by the size and the composition of the research sample consisting of vocational schoolteachers, the obtained results can contribute to the current knowledge in the field. Since they do not fully explain the differences between individual self-governing regions and cannot be generalised to the population of Slovak vocational schoolteachers, they can serve as a basis for further research activities.

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